

# **How EQIP Works in the Pacific Basin Area**

## **Introduction**

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) offers cost-share assistance to farmers and ranchers to implement conservation practices that address the state's priority natural resource concerns on eligible agricultural lands. It is a voluntary U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) program that optimizes environmental benefits and promotes production agriculture and environmental quality as compatible goals. EQIP is administered by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

## **Local Working Groups**

Each year, NRCS Pacific Basin Area solicits input from local working groups in American Samoa, Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. The local work groups serve as the starting point for the development and coordination of USDA programs. They ensure that conservation needs assessments are developed using community stakeholder input.

Based on the information gathered during the assessment process, the local work groups identify priority natural resource concerns and suggest ranking criteria to evaluate each EQIP application. They also recommend conservation practices, cost-share rates, payment levels, and funding allocation. The Pacific Basin Area's local working groups provide valuable input at the island or village level to address island natural resource concerns.

## **State Technical Advisory Committee**

Following solicitation of input from the local work groups, the NRCS Pacific Basin Area Director convenes the State Technical Advisory Committee to review EQIP programmatic suggestions. The State Technical Advisory Committee then advises the Pacific Basin Area Director on priority natural resource concerns, ranking criteria, eligible practices, cost-share rates, payment levels and funding allocation on an island wide basis.

## **Priority Natural Resource Concerns in the Pacific Basin Area**

Based on recommendations from the local work groups and advice from the State Technical Advisory Committee, the following five common resource concerns are priorities for fiscal year 2004 EQIP in the Pacific Basin Area:

- Reduction of non-point source pollutants, such as nutrients, sediment, or pesticides within impaired watersheds.
- Reduction of groundwater and surface contamination, and the conservation of ground and surface water resources. (Comprehensive Nutrient Management and Integrated Pest Management Plans).
- Reduction in soil erosion and sedimentation from unacceptably high rates on agricultural land.
- Control of exotic weeds and pests.
- Promotion of habitat recovery.
- Control of excess surface runoff or flooding.

## **Eligibility**

Any agricultural producer engaged in livestock or crop production on eligible land may apply for EQIP. Eligible land includes cropland; rangeland; pasture land; private, non-industrial forestland; and other farm or ranch lands as determined by the Secretary of Agriculture. Applicants must also have control of the land for the contract period (between 2 and 10 years) to be eligible for participation. Contact your island's USDA Service Center or Field Office for complete information on eligibility requirements.

## **Sign-Up Periods**

Interested farmers and ranchers may apply for EQIP cost-share assistance at any time during the year at your island's USDA Service Center or Field Office. Periodically throughout the year, sign-up periods for ranking purposes are set by the Pacific Basin Area Director, with advice from the local work groups and State Technical Advisory Committee. Applications received prior to or during a sign-up period are then evaluated and selected for conservation plan development.

## **Ranking, and Selecting Applications for Funding**

In order to optimize environmental benefits, NRCS Pacific Basin Area has developed ranking criteria to prioritize EQIP applications for funding each fiscal year. Ranking criteria for evaluating applications are developed for the three island groups, American Samoa, Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, with input from the local work groups and the State Technical Advisory Committee.

Applicants are evaluated and ranked based on the ranking criteria listed on the Pacific Basin Area: EQIP Ranking Criteria Worksheet.

After all eligible applicants have been evaluated and ranked, contracts are awarded to the EQIP applicants with the highest environmental benefit points. The number of awardees is based on the funding made available to the state from national allocations.

## **For More Information**

Please contact NRCS at your local USDA Service Center or Field Office for more information.

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